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CHRIEMHILD.

BY LUCY LARCOM.

You know the strange old Nibelungen story,
The fitful, billowy song of love and hate;
Of fair Chriemhild, and her rose-garden's glory,
By wrath laid desolate.

Glad shines that garden, with its leagues of roses,
Midway the old time and the new between;
And not a flower its silken bar incloses
So sweet as the Rose-Queen.

She walks there, in the young world's changeful morning,
Entwining hero-garlands redly gay;
For twelve strong knights, all armed for battle-warning,
To watch the garden, stay.

She seeks, undaunted, its remotest edges,
Out from the forest's still and murky gloom,
Where, right against weird glens and caverned ledges,
The freshest roses bloom.

Black shadows, in behind the beech-leaves hidden,
That lean to clutch the sunshine's falling gold,
And dim, deep thickets, by white glimmerings thridden,
Send her no thrill of cold.

And she can hear, by woman's fears unshaken,
The warrior-pine's long requiem on the air;
And echoes that from unseen hollows waken
A death-wail of despair.

She can pluck roses, unaware of danger,
For innocence keeps watch and ward within;
To evil dreads a careless, happy stranger,
Unvisited of sin.

Thus, o'er the background of an age of terror,
As down a midnight sky the star of love,
Sinking at last in cloudy gulfs of error,
Chriemhild doth brightly move.

One night a dream alighted in her bower:
A mystic falcon perched upon her hand.
Daring and beautiful, he curbed his power,
As waiting her command.

Then two fierce eagles, through the vision swooping,
Plunged into that brave bird their cruel claws,
And snatched him from her sight, with sorrow drooping;
Ah! bitter was the cause;

For Siegfried was that falcon, her heart's chosen;
Though yet in maiden thought forsworn, unseen;
Melting in passionate love, to horror frozen:
So reads thy fate, sweet queen!

Sweet queen! alas, alas! sweet queen no longer.
In wild and bloody anger fades the dream.

The lurid lines of destiny burn stronger,
And hide her beauty's beam.

Gaze long upon the dear, sad face before you,
For ne'er a lovelier lady will you see;
Dew-bright from her own garden bending o'er you;
The Rose of Burgundy.

'Tis on the wall of a Bavarian palace;*
A fresco by a master-limner wrought:
You see Chriemhild herself, ere wasting malice
Had all to ruin brought.

She clings to Siegfried, holding on her finger
The falcon of her vision—fated bird!
While nearer, swifter, where his glances linger,
The rush of doom is heard.

Behold the nucleus of the old song's glory:
This is the picture of Chriemhild to keep;
For you can only finish the wild story
To shudder and to weep.

Link not her name with Etzel's barbarous splendor,
Nor the bold Nibelung's awful snare of death;
Embalm her memory, womanly and tender,
In love's most sacred breath.

In vain! it is too plain—that hateful writing;
Mapped out with blood, her own revengeful plan.
In her own fury her rose-garden blighting,
As woman's fury can.

Chriemhild herself, beneath Love's warm, white pinions,
Bred the twin vultures, Jealousy and Hate,
That tore her falcon, spoiled her fair dominions,
And left her desolate.

Yet she was robbed of all that she had cherished:
Black was the outrage that transformed her so.
Ah! better had she with brave Siegfried perished,
Than lived to work such wo.

O love, in human lives how desecrated—
On history's roll how stained thy holy name,
With envy and with dark revenge mismated,
And made a thing of shame!

Yet the heart's instincts are no less immortal.
Aye, lovely in her love, Chriemhild shall stand
Beside her true knight at the palace-portal,
The dream-bird on her hand.

* Below, on each side of this door (in the new palace at Munich), are two beautiful groups. That to the right of the spectator represents Siegfried and Chriemhild. She is leaning on the shoulder of her warlike husband with an air of the most inimitable and graceful abandonment in her whole figure; a falcon sits upon her hand, on which her eyes are turned with the most profound expression of tenderness and melancholy; she is thinking upon her dream, in which was foreshadowed the early and terrible doom of her husband.
—Mrs. Jameson.